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Rebellions follow Bhutto assassination

Pakistanis fault U.S.-backed regime

By Deirdre Griswold

The crisis in Pakistan has entered a new and even more acute phase with the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, head of the Pakistan Peoples Party, who had returned from exile just two months earlier. She was killed on Dec. 27 while driving through a large welcoming crowd in Rawalpindi following a political rally.

The regimes of both Gen. Pervez Musharraf in Islamabad and George W. Bush in Washington rushed to blame the brutal murder on Islamic militants.

Their pronouncements failed to convince the public. Even the major imperialist newspapers in the U.S. and Britain have had to admit that the Pakistani people put the responsibility for Bhutto's death squarely on the government.

Demonstrations and clashes with the armed bodies of the state continue across Pakistan. The mass demonstration of popular outrage has targeted especially offices of the government, Musharraf's ruling party and symbols of the military and superrich elite, including hundreds of bank offices. Some 58 people were killed, most by troops and paramilitaries firing on the people.

A private videotape of the assassination aired widely in the Pakistani media and abroad, including on Britain's Channel 4 News, shows Bhutto being felled by an assassin's bullets before a bomb blast hits her car, contradicting the official account that she died, not from gunfire, but from hitting her head on a sunroof lever after the blast. The military refused to allow an autopsy to take place, but doctors at the hospital where she was treated said she appeared to have been killed by bullets to the head.

In an e-mail sent in October, after an earlier attempt had failed to kill her, Bhutto advised a British friend that if anything were to happen to her, she would hold Musharraf responsible.

U.S. supported military dictatorships

Pakistan, a major client state of the U.S. and ally in the Cold War beginning in the 1950s, has been under military rule for most of this time and has received billions of dollars in U.S. military aid and equipment. However, there were brief periods

of elected civilian government between coups. Bhutto's father held the post of prime minister during one of them; he was overthrown by the military and later hanged. Benazir Bhutto served twice as prime minister—from 1988-1990 and 1993-1996, when she was forced out of office, then charged with corruption and sent into exile.

General Musharraf, the latest in a string of military dictators, seized power in a coup in 1999 but later reinvented his rule by creating a political party and winning the presidency in an election widely regarded as rigged. During these eight years, the poverty of the masses has deepened while much of the country's wealth has gone to the military elite. Musharraf himself has survived several assassination attempts.

After 9/11, Musharraf was strong-armed by the Bush administration into joining Washington's "war on terror." This antagonized many in this majority Islamic country, even though, in Washington's eyes, he wasn't doing enough to support the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan. On Sept. 24, 2006, Musharraf told CBS's "60 Minutes" that U.S. officials had openly threatened to "bomb Pakistan back into the Stone Age" if it did not cooperate more vigorously with Washington's war plans.

In the last year, his military forces carried out a massacre at a Muslim school right in Islamabad and also launched attacks on villages in the Northwest, where there is strong opposition to the U.S.-led war in neighboring Afghanistan.

Opposition to Musharraf's rule became tempestuous this spring and summer after Supreme Court justices defied his authority, ruling that he could not run again for president while heading up the military. Demonstrations and strikes broke out all over the country. They were brutally broken up by the state and thousands, including hundreds of lawyers and jurists, were jailed for demanding an end to martial law and the restoration of democracy.

Musharraf sacked the judges and appointed a new Supreme Court, whose members did as they were told and ruled that his "re-election" for president, which had taken place during a boycott by the opposition, was valid, as long as he officially dropped the title of head of the armed forces, which he did. The stage was then set for parliamentary elections, which were set for Jan. 8,

Continued on page 8



Immokalee farmworkers and supporters march on the Burger King headquarters in Miami.

PHOTO: ANDY LIN

FARM WORKERS V. BURGER KING

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NEW ORLEANS

Residents fight to save public housing

By Larry Hales

On Dec. 20—just five days before the Christmas holiday—residents and supporters of New Orleans public housing were denied their right to speak regarding the demolition of 4,700 public housing units. The housing is to be replaced by “mixed income housing,” which really means upscale and expensive housing.

What ensued before and after the now majority white city council voted in favor of demolition was a riot of state forces—city council security, New Orleans SWAT and regular police—taser and tear-gassing people demanding their right to housing. The city council vote threatens to create thousands more homeless in a city that already has 12,000 homeless people, many of them former residents of public housing.

Videos of the horrific shoving and dragging of an elderly woman with a cane, along with the pushing, tossing to the ground, taser and tear-gassing of people has been seen by many. However, the process by which the attempt to take-over and redefine the “Big Easy” is even more insidious.

The winds and storm surges of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita blew and washed away the façade the U.S. likes to present of life in the states.

The design to retake inner city areas, where workers from oppressed nationalities and poor white workers have lived for generations, is taking place across the country. It has become known as gentrification, but to many in the oppressed community it is nothing less than ethnocide—the intentional destruction of a people’s culture.

This process not only includes the destruction of affordable housing, but also beefed up police forces that terrorize communities, rising cases of police brutality, “zero tolerance” ordinances that target people of color, declining schools, scant access to resources and public transportation—all to replace the inhabitants of the areas with affluent whites.

New Orleans, though, is shaping up to be a battleground and the rallying cry—not just for the Black masses, but for all those in the fight for self determination for oppressed nationalities and human rights.

Rotten redevelopment from day one

The aims of the local ruling elite were clear from the very beginning. James Reiss, the wealthy white head of the Regional Transportation Authority, stated in January 2006, “Those who want to see this city rebuilt want to see it done in a completely different way: demographically, geographically and politically.” Reiss was made chairperson of the Bring New Orleans Back Commission. He reportedly brought in an Israeli security team to guard his home in the aftermath of Katrina.

Reiss stated further: “I’m not just speaking for myself here. The way we’ve been living is not going to happen again, or we’re out.” His statements were in response to the demand of residents of the Lower 9th Ward that rebuilding efforts start immediately.

The Lower 9th Ward is one of the lowest lying points in the city and any



PHOTO: JOHNNIE STEVENS

Pastor Torin Sanders protests at City Council meeting in New Orleans.

flooding of New Orleans would mean that the Lower 9th Ward, with a 98 percent Black population before the storm, would take on water—and it did, from at least three sources.

The city stalled all rebuilding efforts for four months in the most devastated areas, at the urging of real estate developer Joseph Canizaro. The fate of the areas was then slated to be determined by how many people return to rebuild.

According to the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, the Lower 9th Ward had a 37 percent poverty rate. Twenty-seven percent of the people were elderly and 25 percent were children.

So, though 60 percent of the homes were occupied by the owners, many would not be able to return because of the burden of finding alternative housing, food and clothing. With no work and paltry federal assistance, the price of rebuilding would be nearly impossible.

The bulldozing of homes in the Lower 9th went as planned and most of the area is now overgrown with grass, but some residents have returned and are attempting to rebuild.

Attack on public education

Every facet of life in New Orleans has been made increasingly difficult by local, state and federal officials. The schools are no different.

Since Hurricane Katrina, \$44.8 million in federal monies have gone to charter schools. The decision to have the state of Louisiana take over Orleans Parish School

District was decided shortly after Katrina struck and while people were still waiting to be rescued.

Leigh Davis reports in a Counterpunch article: “Within days of Katrina, Gov. Kathleen Blanco (D) convened a special meeting of the state legislature to talk about a take-over of the Orleans Parish Public School District, a district with a half-billion dollar budget serving New Orleans. ...

“A few months later, the state legislature passed legislation giving the state control of 107 of New Orleans’ 128 public schools, by placing them under the authority of the Recovery School District (RSD).” (Aug. 30, 2006)

Almost half of the children in New Orleans attend the charter schools and half attend schools under the authority of the RSD. The rest attend private schools, which opened months after Katrina.

Leigh also reports that 7,500 school

personnel were placed on “disaster leave.” Many of them are still denied jobs and the right to collective bargaining.

Attorney Bill Quigley reports that hundreds of children returning for the fall 2007 semester were denied access to public schools. He quotes a teacher who said: “The public schools are totally fragmented. The struggles are still the same. Students still have difficult situations at home; some are still in trailers or living with too many people in one small home. Schools still lack books and materials, which I don’t understand.”

The fight is not over

Yet the battle for New Orleans has begun. Though the ruling local elite have been able to maneuver the election of a white majority into city council—a council that was dominated by Blacks, in a city that was 68 percent Black since 1976—the Black people of New Orleans are returning home and now make up a slight majority in population.

It is not that people are not paying attention, but that the daily struggle of life intervenes and is exacerbated by the particular circumstances of New Orleans.

The callousness of those in power and the brutality of state forces on Dec. 20 have awakened many around the country. If the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Housing Authority of New Orleans think they can demolish the 4,700 units that comprise Lafitte, St. Bernard, B.W. Cooper and CJ Peete, then they have another thing coming.

The demolitions are slated to begin in January, but activists have already called for protests and resistance to the destruction of the housing units. □



WW PHOTO: FIGHT IMPERIALISM, STAND TOGETHER (FIST)

Vigil in front of City Hall in Raleigh, N.C., Dec. 21 in solidarity with housing struggle in New

In 2008
After Hurricane Katrina:



Why Is US Government Destroying
4,700 Affordable Public Housing Units?

WeChargeGenocide.com

- 45% increase in Rents
- 12,000 Homeless people
- 2/3 of housing stock destroyed
- 40,000 families living in trailers will be evicted by spring 2008
- 200,000 plus, residents displaced throughout the country

National poster on racist displacement and genocide in New Orleans.

WECHARGEGENOCID

Ohio needs a moratorium

Judges’ rulings stop some foreclosures

By Martha Grevatt

The foreclosure crisis in Ohio has become desperate, with hundreds of homes put up for auction every week in Cleveland’s Cuyahoga County alone. Now some judges’ rulings have given partial relief with a complex decision that has yet to be played out.

Once again Ohio rivals Michigan in rust-belt poverty numbers. Statistics vary as to which state leads the country in foreclosures, but it is one or the other. Cleveland is second only to Detroit when it comes to banks going after workers’ homes.

The Cleveland Plain Dealer reported on Dec. 25 that homeowners are seeing some badly needed relief. This past Oct. 31, Federal District Court Judge Christopher A. Boyko dismissed 14 foreclosure filings. On the Web site iamfacingforeclosure.com, Moe Bedard and Aaron Krowne explained the complex ruling:

“Judge Boyko issued an order requiring the Plaintiffs in a number of pending foreclosure cases to file a copy of the executed Assignment demonstrating Plaintiff (Deutsche Bank) was the holder and owner of the Note and Mortgage as of the date the Complaint was filed, or the court would enter a dismissal.

“The Court’s amended General Order No. 2006-16 requires Plaintiff (Deutsche Bank) to submit an affidavit along with the complaint, which identifies Plaintiff as the original mortgage holder, or as an assignee, trustee or successor-interest.

“Apparently Deutsche Bank submitted several affidavits that claim that Deutsche was in fact the owner of the mortgage note, but none of these affidavits mention assignment or trust or successor interest.

“Thus, the Judge ruled that in every instance, these submissions create a ‘conflict’ and they ‘do not satisfy’ the burden of demonstrating at the time of filing the complaint, that Deutsche Bank was in fact the ‘legal’ note holder.”

According to Jacksonville Area Legal Aid Attorney April Charney:

“This court order is what I have been saying in my cases. This is rampant fraud on every court in America or nonjudicial foreclosure fraud where the securitized trusts are filing foreclosures when they never own/hold the mortgage loan at the commencement of the foreclosure. So with this decision, it appears confirmed that investors in the mortgage debacle may in fact own nothing—not even the bad loans they funded!”

The reason foreclosure filings ended up in federal courts in the first place was that mortgage holders were seeking a legal short cut, bypassing the huge backlog in the Cuyahoga County and other Ohio county court systems. Now some Ohio homeowners are getting a break.

Foreclosures filed in Cleveland federal court were averaging 100 per month before Judge Boyko’s ruling but in December dropped to two. As of Dec. 31, federal judges in Dayton and Columbus have issued decisions concurring with Judge Boyko.

The federal ruling led Hamilton County Common Pleas Court Judge Steven E. Martin to rule Dec. 7 that Wells Fargo Bank could not legally foreclose on the Cincinnati-area home of Gloria and Ellsworth Byrd, because the bank’s lawyers didn’t prove that Wells Fargo was the legal owner of the mortgage before it filed the foreclosure lawsuit.

However, while this is good news for the Byrds and others, these court rulings will only slow down a crisis that has reached disastrous levels.

All but three of Ohio’s 88 counties have seen



WW PHOTO: CHERYL LABASH

Michigan activists have begun organizing to demand a moratorium on home foreclosures. This protest was on Nov. 27, outside a mayors’ meeting in Detroit.

an increase in foreclosure filings in 2007.

Cuyahoga County has been hit the hardest. Cleveland and the “inner ring” suburbs—where the Black population is concentrated and poverty is staggering—have the most foreclosures, both numerically and per capita, in the county.

Yet the highest increase in the rate of foreclosure filings has been in the higher income “outer” suburbs. The predominantly white suburb of Parma, home to a General Motors plant and many autoworkers, has seen the number of filings double in the past year. Foreclosures are a class-wide problem.

Altogether nearly 90,000 Ohio households are currently at risk of losing their homes. Many are the victims of predatory schemes. In Summit County three lending companies—Carnation Banc, Evergreen Companies and Brittain Holdings—were just indicted, with prosecutors labeling them “financial criminals who overvalue homes, borrow money under false statements and sell securities backed by worthless second mortgages.”

Craig Conner, former president of Carnation Banc, has already pleaded guilty to engaging in a pattern of corrupt activity and 21 other felonies.

The case of Katie Turner of Dayton is typical. In 1997, after her husband’s death, Turner refinanced and saw her adjustable-rate mortgage payment jump from \$527 to more than \$865 over the next three years. After she made one late payment, her monthly bill increased to more than \$1,000.

Turner was able, with the help of an agency, to renegotiate a workable arrangement. Most homeowners will not be so lucky. For many, selling their property is not even an option in the current economic recession. Housing values have fallen throughout the state, which means that even those able to find a buyer for their home may be selling at a price that is less than what they owe, and they could still be in debt after using that money to pay off the mortgage.

The state’s politicians have voiced concern, but none have taken concrete action. U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, a first-term Democrat, has suggested that Congress is limited in what it can do and “the president has not used the power of his office.”

Ohio Attorney General Marc Dann has voiced agreement with the judges’ ruling and reportedly will push for dismissal of dozens of cases across the state. Gov. Ted Strickland has said he will propose legislation to stop foreclosures—but when? The crisis demands that the politicians do more than talk about what they intend to do and actually do something.

Judge Boyko’s ruling, with which legal authorities at the county, state, and federal level concur, demonstrates that many of these foreclosures are not only inhumane but downright illegal. Clearly, activists calling for a halt to the threats against their homes have legal leverage.

As in Michigan, where grass-roots groups have begun to fight foreclosures, the Ohio foreclosure epidemic calls for drastic measures to defend workers and their families from the illegal predations of finance capital. Now, not later, is the time for an immediate moratorium on home foreclosures in the Midwest and across the country. □

ON THE PICKET LINE
by Sue Davis

Workers strike war profiteer

Some 4,000 members of 11 Auto Workers’ locals in Georgia, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Texas who build MaxxPro engines for blast-resistant Navistar trucks used by the U.S. military in Iraq conducted an unfair labor practice strike for nearly two months ending Dec. 17, when the workers ratified a three-year contract. International Truck and Engine, which tried hiring scabs to maintain its war profits, initially took a hard line but eventually gave in to the strikers’ demands.

The most important aspect of the new contract, which includes an immediate \$2,500 payment and a 6 percent pay raise over the course of the contract, pension upgrades, and health care protections, is a moratorium on plant closings and outsourcing during the life of the contract.

“While it is not a strike against the war, it is still significant that workers have struck a war profiteer in the midst of war,” noted Larry Goldbetter, member of the National Writers Union, UAW Local 1981, in an e-mail to U.S. Labor Against the War.

Striking laundry workers hold vigil

In early December, Danny Glover joined striking workers from Prudential Overall Supply, the largest laundry company based in California, when they began a 12-day vigil outside company headquarters in Irvine. The workers at five facilities across the state have been striking against unfair labor practices since Sept. 12. Fighting to improve wages, healthcare and working conditions, the workers, many of them immigrants, have been met by constant threats, coercion and intimidation.

In July the laundry workers and UNITE HERE filed a complaint with the Department of Labor alleging violations of wage, benefit, holiday and paid time-off standards at Prudential facilities in California and Arizona. The workers, who filed complaints alleging violations of local living wage ordinances in San Diego, Oakland, Los Angeles and Ventura County, were vindicated when San Diego and Oakland terminated their contracts with Prudential and sued the company for back wages for \$1.82 million and \$120,000, respectively.

Prudential backed out of its contract when notified that Ventura County’s Living Wage ordinance would be enforced, and workers’ complaints in Los Angeles are still being investigated. The struggle continues.

Wal-Mart’s sexual discrimination

The three-member Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in Los Angeles ruled Dec. 12 that the largest sexual discrimination case in U.S. history could proceed as a class action suit against Wal-Mart. Nearly two million women, who since 1998 have worked for the world’s largest retailer and super-exploiter of workers, stand to collect billions in unpaid wages and damages for being excluded from promotions. But there’s a hitch. The decision also allows Wal-Mart to appeal the ruling. Stay tuned.

Make contracts LGBT-inclusive!

Pride at Work, the AFL-CIO affiliate that promotes lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights on the job, has developed a Union Certification Program to help workers negotiate LGBT-inclusive contracts. Its first training took place in November with OPEIU Local 29 in Oakland, Calif.

During the five-hour training, attendees learned how to add contract language that protects LGBT workers from discrimination and harassment on the job and gives them access to federal programs like the Family and Medical Leave Act. They also learned how to argue for domestic partner benefits and transgender-inclusive health care. To find out more about the program, contact paw@aflcio.org; to set up a training session so your union can become certified, contact jbishop@aflcio.org.

Flight attendants need support

Imagine working up to 20 days a month away from home as a full-time employee and not qualifying for a family or medical leave when you or a family member needs help. That’s what flight attendants and pilots face because of the narrow wording mandating a 40-hour workweek in the Family and Medical Leave Act.

To rectify that, the Airline Flight Crew Family and Medical Leave Act was introduced in Congress last fall. The struggle for passage continues in 2008. To show your support, write a letter to lawmakers; a sample letter is posted on the Flight Attendants’ Web site: www.afanet.org. To ensure hand-delivery to Congress, address the letter to AFA-CWA, Office of Government Affairs, 501 Third St. NW, Washington, DC 20001.

NLRB issues Scrooge ruling

Just in time to qualify for a Scrooge award, the National Labor Relations Board issued a 3-2 ruling on Dec. 21 that gives an employer the right to prohibit workers from using the company’s e-mail system to send out union-related messages. The ruling said it was legal for employers to have a policy barring employees from sending e-mail for “non-job-related solicitations” for any outside organization. But how can bosses dare prohibit workers from communicating about work-related matters of mutual concern? Though the NLRB has never throughout its history been a consistent friend of labor, it’s typical that a Bush-appointed NLRB would issue such a narrow, vindictive ruling. Just another reason workers will continue to organize and fight for their rights in 2008! □

Immokalee workers step up battle against Burger King

By Michael Martinez
Miami

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), an organization that represents farmworkers in central Florida, on Dec. 23 extended their struggle to workers at the Burger King restaurant in the Miami neighborhood of Aventura by holding a picket there. On Nov. 30, the CIW had led a nine-mile-long march of 1,500 workers and their supporters down to the Burger King corporate offices in Miami demanding a penny more per pound raise for the tomatoes they pick.

The CIW has been waging fights against some of the largest U.S.-based fast food corporations. These farmworkers, who mostly pick tomatoes, are fighting to improve living and working conditions from what can only be called modern day slavery.

The first stop on the Nov. 30 march targeted Goldman Sachs, a large investment firm that owns a big portion of the

BK Corporation's stock and has executives sitting on BK Corporation's board of directors. According to a Dec. 20, 2006, article in the New York Times, Lloyd C. Blankfein, chairman and chief executive of Goldman Sachs, was paid "a bonus of \$53.4 million in 2006, the highest ever for a Wall Street chief executive" — most of it coming off of the backs of farmworkers.

Most of the farmworkers receive 40-to-45 cents for each 32-pound bucket of tomatoes that they pick. After a 10-hour workday, they would have to have picked up to 2 tons each in order to make a little over \$50, barely making the minimum wage. These farmworkers have been working for the same rates since their last pay raise in 1978.

Paying the extra penny would only cost the multibillionaire fast-food giant \$250,000 a year, yet they refuse to budge.

In 2005, the CIW led a national boycott against another fast food giant, Taco Bell. Workers and students all over the coun-

try joined in solidarity in a campaign known as "boot the bell" that included hunger strikes. This struggle forced Taco Bell to the negotiating table.

McDonald's also came to the negotiating table last April in the face of possible protests or a boycott. Despite all of these advancements and the Nov. 30 historic nine-mile march, the Burger King bosses vow to resist the penny raise and preserve the living conditions in Florida's fields.

But all is not grim, students and workers from several unions including the Teamsters, SEIU, CWA and UNITE HERE are joining the CIW in the fight to halt the decline in wages. The struggle for a penny more will escalate and even Burger King restaurant employees are joining the fight. At the Dec. 23 picket at the local Burger King restaurant in mostly the white upscale Aventura neighborhood, restaurant workers cheered the picketers and some even came out and joined the demonstrators.



PHOTO: FRITZ MYER

Apparently, the Burger King employees were first told that they were going to be paid before Christmas, but on that Sunday they were told, "No paychecks until after Christmas." So as the protest started to build the employees started to cheer from within the restaurant. When the chant, "No more slaves! Pay a living wage!" started, one worker even came outside to lead the chant.

The CIW is sending a full-time team back to Miami after the first of the year. So there will be a lot more actions coming up both here and around the U.S.

The writer is from the Bolivarian Youth in Miami, who have participated in the CIW actions.

Bosses use ICE to chill a union drive

By Milt Neidenberg

Just two weeks before a union representation election in the midst of the holiday season, online grocery delivery giant Fresh Direct shocked its 2,000 employees. The company demanded that workers produce documents like Social Security cards to update records for an Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency/Homeland Security (ICE) inspection.

Most vulnerable were the 900 warehouse workers slated to vote. Overwhelmingly Latina and women of color, they work in 12- to 18-hour shifts with forced overtime, for a starting wage of \$7.50. Standing in near freezing temperatures in the refrigerated warehouse, they price, pack and load boxes, some heavy with canned goods, onto delivery trucks. Many who had been on the payroll since the company was formed had signed union cards and looked forward to an election that would lead to decent wages, working conditions and a sense of security and dignity.

It looked like a winnable election for the union. Then in came the federal agents—ICE, armed and dangerous—ordering the workers to produce proof of their legality. It was reported that at least 100 workers quit, and supervisors suspended dozens of workers who couldn't produce paperwork.

Sandy Pope, president of Local 805 Teamsters, one of the unions on the ballot, described the mayhem: "Some people just walked out the door. They were sobbing [as they carried] garbage bags of clothes from their lockers." Fearful that they would be arrested and separated from their children and families, they didn't wait to pick up their checks.

In spite of the brutal repression by ICE and though it was riddled with unfair labor practices orchestrated by Fresh Direct, the election the National Labor Relations Board set for December 22-23 stayed on schedule as if nothing had happened. The other union on the ballot competing with the Teamsters was the United Food and Commercial Workers. The NLRB should have postponed the election and called for hearings.

The NLRB's "speak no evil" policy eloquently points out the erosion of protections workers had under the National Labor Relations Act, a law won by the blood and sacrifices of the workers during

the struggles of the 1930s Depression.

Immediately following the sham election, there was no surprise when Fresh Direct management boasted that 80 percent of plant employees voted "no union." They did not mention that only 530 of 900 eligible workers showed up. Three hundred and seventy members wisely decided not to show up as the ICE agents threatened to arrest them. And even under a flawed election, over 100 members voted for the union. As of Jan. 1, none of the locals on the ballot have issued public statements.

A week prior to the election, the New York City Central Labor Council held a press conference on the steps of City Hall targeting the ICE raids on Fresh Direct workers. It was co-chaired by CLC director Ed Ott and Labor Council on Latin American Advancement President Sonia Ivany. The turnout of about 100—mainly union officials, politicians and clergy—pointed out the widespread union bust-

ing and the corporations' collusion with the state's repressive agencies that target immigrant workers.

Ott's opening remarks charged that the ICE raid on Fresh Direct was part of a national pattern and "no coincidence, comes now in the middle of an NLRB election." He blamed the federal government and Fresh Direct complicity in interfering with the workers' right to have a union. Other speakers reinforced this theme, spotlighting the conduct of Fresh Direct and ICE.

There was, however, no action proposal put forward calling for a fight back to stem the tidal wave of attacks on the labor movement and the broad-based attack on 12 million hard-working immigrants.

With the nation embroiled in imperialist wars and class warfare and national oppression on the rise, wouldn't it be reasonable to begin discussing a campaign to shut down the country for one day—a

one-day national work strike. The tactic is already being used abroad, especially in some European countries.

In their own insidious way, the banks and corporations in their own class interests are already shutting down on the poor and the workers. Look at the foreclosures and the destruction of desperately needed public housing in New Orleans.

Plant closings and layoffs shut out the workers from the means of production and subsistence. Poverty and hunger shut off the masses from economic and personal security. Decent education is denied youth of color and 47 million are shut out of elementary health care. Prisons are packed with workers of many nationalities shut out by bars of isolation and repression. The very future of the planet is threatened by corporate polluters.

Isn't it time for working people to shut down work for one day in their own class interests? □

Toro to be in court on Jan. 18

Victor Toro Ramírez fought the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile. Now he is fighting deportation from the U.S., and is linking his own struggle to that of all undocumented workers.

Toro arrived in the U.S. in 1984 and settled in the South Bronx, N.Y. In 1987 he co-founded La Peña del Bronx, a community grassroots organization serving the poor and the needs of the community, with his life partner and partner in struggle for social justice, Nieves Ayress.

On July 6, 2007, while on an Amtrak passenger train, Victor Toro was arrested and detained by the Border Patrol (ICE) in Rochester, N.Y. Toro, who is out on bail and continuing to organize, will be in court again on Jan. 18. His defense committee asks everyone to come out and show support at 26 Federal Plaza in Manhattan in New York.

Toro wrote recently that at his hearing he hopes to discuss with the movement his proposals, which he has developed in a statement that we publish a part of below.

Struggle of immigrants in 2008

The year 2008 will provide great opportunities for immigrant workers to carry out their tasks and struggles for the poor

and marginalized people of the United States and the world, and with the understanding this is a development involving great projects carried out on a universal scale, we will have to change things.

In spite of contradictions weighing on the class struggle in this country, I would like to present some optimistic proposals for how I see that we can meet the challenges of 2008.

We count upon the existence of a social, union and political rearmament far greater than that which existed ten years ago. We rearmed at a high level in 2006 to carry out protests, mobilizations and strikes throughout the entire country involving thousands of people, and on May 1, 2006, our struggle for unconditional amnesty reached its highest level, with a protest movement of a million people in cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, New York, Washington and many other cities. It was a movement that made the country's Democratic-Republican bureaucracy tremble with fear.

Until 2005 we were invisible. In 2006 we became visible in the press media of those in power. And in 2007 we again became invisible. We have to change history. We advanced in one year more than we could in the half century before it. The

victories won at local and regional levels will not change.

The main demands and those that mobilized the most people were the struggle for a general amnesty and the struggles against the war in Iraq and the Middle East. Parallel to this situation and its social and popular skirmishes, there were developing crises, that of the monstrous costs of the imperialist war, the one of the war deaths of the U.S. Armed Forces members and the reactions of their relatives, the case of those tortured in Iraq and Guantánamo, the continual scandals involving the Bush gang and its allies, the sub-prime mortgage crisis, the rapid increase in repressive violence and racism, whose greatest expression came with the Katrina hurricane in New Orleans, the anti-terrorism and anti-immigration campaigns, the instability of Wall St., also the threat of an economic recession, global warming and the overweening responsibility of the Bush administration for it, the construction of a wall on the U.S.-Mexican border. ...

Toro goes on to call for going forward to organize from the bottom up a national protest to stop all work on May 1, 2008, to fight for an unconditional amnesty now!

'Not us. We're not going'

Soldiers refuse orders in Iraq

By Dustin Langley

“Our army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers and noncommissioned officers, drug-ridden, and dispirited where not near-mutinous conditions [exist] among American forces in Vietnam that have only been exceeded in this century by ... the collapse of the czarist armies in 1916 and 1917.”

—Armed Forces Journal, June 1971

One of the most underreported stories from the Vietnam War is the role played by the disintegration of military discipline as the war dragged on. While the situation in Iraq has not reached the same point yet, revolutionaries understand that the fact that the bosses are forced to rely on workers in uniform to wage their wars raises the possibility that the troops will say, “No.”

On July 18 last year, members of 2nd Platoon, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, held a meeting and decided collectively that they would refuse to obey an order to go out on patrol in the Adhamiya region of Iraq. They determined, after an IED (improvised explosive device) attack had killed five more members of Charlie Company, that they could “no longer function professionally.”

A recent four-part series in the Army Times tells Charlie Company’s story, which is the basis for this article’s report

on the mutiny. The series, without openly questioning the U.S. role as occupier of Iraq, idealizes the strong friendships among the U.S. troops and their willingness to make sacrifices for their buddies.

For revolutionaries reading the Army Times series, it should be obvious that Washington has placed these U.S. troops in an impossible situation: they must carry out an occupation of a hostile country whose population is highly motivated, well-armed and capable of fighting back and winning, just as in Vietnam.

Charlie Company’s verbal response to losing their buddies was that they wanted to massacre Iraqis. Their physical response, however, was to break military discipline, refusing orders to go out on patrol.

Charlie Company hit hard

Charlie Company had been in Iraq for almost a year and during that time had been one of the hardest hit U.S. units in Iraq, losing 14 troops out of approximately 140.

During the day, Charlie Company patrolled constantly. Each soldier went out three or four times a day, with a one-and-a-half-hour break between patrols. They patrolled in full body armor in the 110-degree heat, but could only shower every two or three days. At night, they slept 25 to a room in a run-down and sour-smelling basement.

Sgt. Shawn Ladue, 27, said of their quarters: “I thought it was a dump. Every

time it’d rain, we’d get that stagnant-ass water in the basement.”

Spc. Gerry DeNardi and Sgt. Ryan Wood wrote a song titled “Adhamiya Blues.” One line from the song says: “War, it degrades the heart and poisons the mind. And we’re tossed aside by governments’ lies.”

DeNardi joined the Army believing, “I don’t think you can say you’re an American or you’re a patriot without serving.”

But a year of bloodshed changed his mind. After living through daily explosions for 11 months, he said: “I’ve seen enough. I’ve done enough.”

Two weeks before his platoon refused orders, the 20-year-old DeNardi lost five friends, killed together as they rode in a Bradley Fighting Vehicle that rolled over an IED.

Meanwhile, their tour was extended from 12 months to 15 months. They had been scheduled to go home June 20.

Just prior to the mutiny, First Sergeant McKinney, a well-loved NCO in Charlie Company, was on patrol with his soldiers, when the stress became too much for him. McKinney said, “I can’t take it anymore.” He took his M4, put it under his chin, and he killed himself in front of his men.

The following week, soldiers from Alpha Company, also of the 1st Battalion, were hit by an IED and lost four men.

Sgt. 1st Class Tim Ybay, 38, 2nd Platoon’s platoon sergeant, said: “I knew after losing those five guys, my platoon had to get out of there. These were the

guys they slept with, joked with, worked out with. I don’t think they’d be able to accomplish the mission.”

The battalion gave 2nd Platoon the day to recover. Then they were scheduled to go back out on patrol in Adhamiya on July 18.

But when Capt. Cecil Strickland, Charlie Company’s commander, returned from a mission on June 18, he learned 2nd Platoon had refused his orders.

“They’re not coming,” Strickland said he was told. “So I called the platoon sergeant and talked to him. ‘Remind your guys: These are some of the things that could happen if they refuse to go out.’ I was irritated they were thumbing their noses. I was determined to get them down there.”

Di Nardi said, “We said, ‘No. If you make us go there, we’re going to light up everything. There’s a thousand platoons. Not us. We’re not going.’”

He was not aware that 2nd Platoon had met and determined that they could no longer function and that members of the platoon were afraid that their anger and stress would result in a massacre. They decided as a platoon that they were done; they would refuse the order to go on patrol, despite the knowledge that mutiny can result in court-martial, imprisonment and even execution.

But no court-martial ever came. “Captain Strickland read us our rights,” DeNardi said. “We had 15 yes-or-no questions, and no matter how you answered

In the shadow of default

U.S. & czarist Russia’s common problem

By Sam Marcy

Originally published on Nov. 23, 1995
The world position of the United States today is somewhat analogous to that of the czarist empire in the 1890s.

At that time the Russian empire was the most feared power in Europe and Asia. It cast its shadow not only over the Balkans but other areas as well, from Turkey to Kamchatka.

There was no question that the czarist regime was most hated among the small and oppressed countries bordering its territory. Exiles from the region kept pouring into the West.

But mighty though the empire seemed to be, and omnipotent in relation to its neighbors, it had one significant flaw: It was unable to pay its debts on time.

There is no way of knowing how serious a debt problem is until a default.

Of course, no one could deny the czarist court when it asked for extensions on its loans. Yet such matters as not being able to pay the bills due its creditors began to assume greater and greater importance.

Yet who would dare refuse to extend credit to the czar? The idea seemed unthinkable.

Militarism and unpaid bills

Like the United States today, czarist Russia was a great military power. It lorded it over all the surrounding neighbors. Its pre-eminence could not be denied.

Yet the question was, could it pay its bills on time?

Was this not the Achilles heel of the czarist empire? The monarchy got a continued stream of extensions. But did they help? Or did they in fact weaken the empire?

Whichever the answer, the debt problem flowed from more profound and general causes. Capitalism came late to Russia. For it to develop, the bourgeoisie needed considerable foreign support to maintain the ruling clique in the style to which it was accustomed—maintaining a rich court, lavishly entertaining foreign business owners and diplomats, and continually expending its resources in wasteful ways.

Yet seen in another light, capitalist development was slowly but surely producing a proletariat that was unique in the world at that time.

Instead of its attention being constantly riveted solely on its own situation of being robbed and exploited by the newly created bourgeoisie, this proletariat looked outward and sought by every means to assimilate the lessons and experiences of its Western counterparts.

No small portion of the czar’s finances was spent in tracking down the newly born, rebellious working class. But to no avail.

Russia’s historical situation at that time is not altogether analogous to the present-day situation in the U.S. But certain similarities are undeniable. The problem of paying debts on time is the most pressing of all.

Floating a new loan for the czar always

seemed minor in comparison with the vastness of the empire and the size of its population—as today in the United States.

But finding an easy solution to the debt problem—one that would not impinge substantially on either of the basic antagonistic classes in contemporary society—is just as elusive for the Clinton administration today as it was for the czar a century ago.

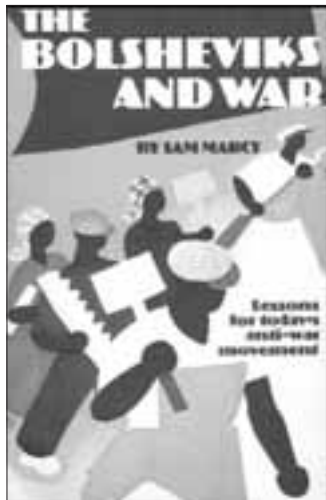
We know now what happened in Old Russia. We also remember the debt problem of the French nobility just prior to the Revolution.

There’s no way of really knowing how significant a debt problem is until there is a default. Under some circumstances, it is easy for a capitalist government to achieve a so-called soft landing—to spread out its indebtedness or reduce its principal or interest through negotiation.

But it’s also possible that, instead of an

About Sam Marcy

No one has contributed more revolutionary insight to this newspaper than Sam Marcy, the founder of Workers World Party, who died 10 years ago on Feb. 1, 1998. We’ll be rerunning a selection from his past articles to familiarize our readers with Marcy, his analyses, and what he had to teach about applying the basics of Marxism and historical materialism to the challenges facing the working class and oppressed today. For more of his writings, see www.workers.org/books. □



The Bolsheviks and War

Lessons for today’s anti-war movement

by Sam Marcy

For most of the Socialist movement, World War I was an unmitigated disaster. The powerful workers’ parties of Western Europe buckled under the war fever. But in Russia, Lenin and the Bolsheviks redoubled their efforts and used the war crisis to organize the revolutionary overthrow of the old order.

What distinguished the Bolsheviks from the other parties in the Socialist International? Was Lenin’s focus on building the party a distraction from the anti-war struggle—or a necessary part of it?

Sam Marcy in this book reexamines questions long at issue in the progressive movement both for the historical record and in light of today’s dangerous international situation and the Pentagon’s post 9/11 wars.

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Withdrawal is the only option

A look back at 2007 in Iraq

them, it looked like you disobeyed an order. No one asked what happened. And there’s no record—no article 15. Nothing to show it happened.”

Instead, battalion leaders began breaking up the platoon. Their only punishment was that members of the platoon were flagged, meaning that they could not receive promotions or awards.

As the brutal occupation of Iraq continues, with politicians from both corporate parties committed to Wall Street’s agenda of domination of the oil-rich Middle East, mutinies, refusals, and other acts of resistance in the ranks will continue.

It is the task of all revolutionaries and progressives, and the antiwar movement as a whole, to be visibly supportive of resistance in the ranks, to continue reaching out to the working class in uniform. In addition, it is to provide the political explanation that shows how the U.S. ruling class—and not the Iraqi resistance—is the real enemy of the working-class U.S. troops.

Many organizations are committed to reaching the troops. In response to plans to call up thousands of National Guard in New Jersey, Military Families Speak Out is distributing literature at National Guard armories where soldiers have orders to deploy to Iraq. The Military Project (www.militaryproject.org) organizes regular outreach to military bases and publishes GI Special, a newsletter focusing on GI resistance and the occupation. □

easy landing, there will be a collapse.

The U.S. debt crisis has to be seen in the light of the international situation. The individual bourgeois states are all trying to cover up their own weaknesses. Where possible, they are of course trying to transfer the burden of the capitalist indebtedness onto the shoulders of the working class.

Nowhere is this easy for any of the capitalist states, not even the strongest. The world economy was knit together by competitive forces in an earlier epoch and has since been fortified by monopoly, whose tentacles stretch all over the globe.

It is interesting to note that today, unlike in earlier years, a few of the bourgeois economists are afraid to make predictions of an early and “easy” landing.

In the meantime, the task for the workers’ movement in the United States is to forge unity with each and every segment of the working class in order to achieve a truly united front of all the working-class and progressive organizations, the unions first of all. □

By Joachim Guilliard*

The financing of U.S. president George W. Bush’s wars is now just about accomplished for 2008. By a large majority, briefly before Dec. 25 the House of Representatives and Senate granted an additional \$70 billion for the occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan. A large number of Democrats again voted for continuing the funding. What made it easier for this bill to pass was that in the U.S. there was a changed perception of the war in occupied Iraq.

Reports of a decrease of violence in Iraq allowed the topic to disappear from the headlines during the past few months. The U.S. government obviously succeeded in selling the reinforcement of combat troops begun last January as a success. According to the Pentagon, the number of attacks decreased by 62 percent in comparison to last March. U.S. troop losses similarly sank.

Propaganda everywhere

The decrease of violence is significant, however, only in comparison to the first half of 2007. At that time what was called “the Surge” led to an overall increase of U.S. troop strength and expansion of military operations. In turn, the increased operations led to an increase in the number of victims among the Iraqis as well as the number of U.S. soldiers killed, so that both climbed to record heights. The same applies to the number of Iraqi prisoners and refugees.

Altogether 2007 became by far the deadliest year of the occupation. The relative calming in the autumn is essentially the result of the U.S. Army’s canceling large offensives. The military analysis organization GlobalSecurity reports only one major operation since the middle of July.

What also had an impact on the media was that two weeks before the votes in Congress, bus convoys with refugees returning from Syria arrived in Baghdad. The U.N.-Refugee Organization found it necessary to contradict the rosy view Washington presented. According to its estimate, security is far from adequate in Iraq.

As the questioning of those who returned home showed, the refugees returned not because conditions had improved inside Iraq, but usually because their visa for the country where they had been staying had run out or they had exhausted their finances. Some were also lured by the \$800 pocket money that the Iraqi government promised to give to those who came home.

Also from the point of view of the Iraqis who remained in the country, nothing improved. On the contrary, inquiries of

BBC and ABC news in September indicated that 70 percent of those polled said that in the course of the troop increase, security continued to worsen, as did the conditions for political dialogue, and the speed of reconstruction and economic development. Newer studies made in November confirm this view.

Iraqis blame occupation

The overwhelming majority of Iraqis holds the occupation troops primarily responsible for the violence in the country and accordingly demands the troops’ immediate departure. (Washington Post, Dec. 19)

In the middle of December the British Army held a celebration in Basra as it transferred control of the southern Iraqi province to Iraqi authorities. This too was sold as a success of the British-American occupation policies. Actually, the British had already withdrawn completely from Basra in September to their base at the airport, far outside of the city, their last base in the country.

Months before, the British had already vacated their bases in the other three provinces they originally occupied. Officially the withdrawal was explained with the cover story that the Iraqi army was ready now to take over local security. Numerous statements by British officers, however, clearly show that the situation had simply become untenable.

“Ninety percent of the violence down here is all against us,” a British officer told the Los Angeles Times (April 19). “You put more people on the ground, you are creating more targets.”

The Western media tried to make it appear that the Iraqi army took control in the South. This was false. The local parties that dominated the region took over.

For example, 1,200 British soldiers faced continuous bombardment as they stayed in the Amarah barracks. The Mehdi Army of the prominent cleric Moqtada al-Sadr took over these barracks immediately after the British left. The inhabitants of Amarah celebrated extensively, calling themselves the “first Iraqi city to throw out the occupiers.”

Later there were battles between the police—which consist mainly of members of the militias of the radical Shiite government party SIIC (formerly SCIRI)—and the followers of al-Sadr, whose movement makes up the provincial government. The conflict was defused by the intervention of high-ranking Iraqi personalities.

“At the end it was an Iraqi solution,” said Lt. Col. Richard Nixon Eckersall, commander at that time of a unit stationed there. Since that time the province has been relatively calm.

In Basra the situation was no better.

British Labor and Liberal Democratic Party members of Parliament from the defense committee, who were in Iraq during July 2007, reported that for the British soldiers, nighttime patrols in the oil metropolis had become “suicide missions.” The population saw these troops as the main problem, and not, as the British government had claimed, as their protectors. (The Guardian, July 25)

Ninety percent of all attacks in Basra were directed against British units, and those carrying out the attacks would often come from the ranks of the “patriotic youth.” Instead of fighting on, the British Army command struck a deal with the parties that control the second largest Iraqi city: in exchange for a guarantee they would no longer be attacked, the British promised to stay outside Basra.

Peace without occupiers

Through the media you get a picture that the consequence of this deal was anarchy and arbitrary violence. As ever, the media emphasized—as if they were again justifying an intervention—attacks by radical Islamic forces on women. The fate of women in the South had never been reported in the media as long as occupation troops were the ones abusing or killing these women.

In reality, after the departure of the British, the situation in Basra immediately became substantially calmer, as officials and citizens of the city told the Reuters press agency (Oct. 1). Political murders still occurred, but much less frequently than at any time since the invasion in 2003. Meanwhile families are again walking on the banks of Shatt al-Arab, even in the evening, which during the past four years had been inconceivable.

Not only in the South, but in the regions where the U.S. was the main occupying force, similar conditions hold, although there is almost no reporting from these regions independent of the U.S. military or critical of it, as there is in the British press. The true situation could still be deduced, however, because fighting calmed down immediately in those areas from which U.S. troops withdrew.

U.S. plans to divide Iraq into Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish areas have little support among the Iraqi population. On the other hand, these partial retreats of the occupation forces often result in establishing independent areas that are controlled by different types of local forces, and could lead to the danger that these areas decay into individual spheres of influence—sort of local fiefdoms—as in Afghanistan.

The unification of the Iraqi national resistance made enormous progress in the course of the year. As long as the U.S. occupation forces are present and capable of launching an attack on concentrations of guerrillas, however, the resistance alliances cannot enter population centers to resolve political problems involving the local groupings. Ever more urgently therefore, what is needed is the complete and systematic withdrawal of all occupation troops, accompanied by negotiations with the resistance and all other relevant forces inside Iraq.

Published in the Berlin daily newspaper Junge Welt, Dec. 27, 2007.

** Joachim Guilliard is a key organizer of the German Iraq Coordination and writes frequently on the occupation of Iraq.*

Translated from German by John Catalinotto.



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‘Charlie Wilson’s War’

How the CIA lynched Afghanistan—the first time

By Stephen Millies

The movie “Charlie Wilson’s War” is no more truthful about Afghanistan than “Gone with the Wind” was about slavery.

The key character is Texas Congressperson Charles Wilson (Tom Hanks), who supposedly drove the Soviet army out of Afghanistan. Charlie is a sexual predator, harassing and exploiting women workers on his staff. He is shown dabbling in cocaine.

But he’s really a swell guy. From his Las Vegas hot tub, Charlie listens to Dan Rather claiming that Soviet planes were dropping toys rigged to maim children. This vicious lie, worthy of Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, allegedly gets Wilson moving.

Wilson teams up with Pakistani dictator Zia ul-Haq to fight for “freedom.” Zia had hanged Benazir Bhutto’s father, Pakistan Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in 1979. Assisting Charlie is right-wing socialite Joanne Herring (Julia Roberts) and CIA agent Gust Avrakotos (Philip Seymour Hoffman). The movie claims that they had to fight do-nothings in the CIA and State Department in order to arm Afghan counterrevolutionaries.

This is a fantasy world, even for Hollywood. By 1981, Ronald Reagan was in the White House presiding over a \$2 trillion arms build-up. He installed “Pershing II” nuclear missiles in Europe that could hit the Soviet Union in eight minutes.

Reagan backed contra terrorists against Nicaragua, invaded Grenada, and propped up death squad regimes in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. The U.S. Air Force bombed Tripoli, murdering Muammar Qaddafi’s daughter, among others. Reagan supplied Israel’s bloody invasion of Lebanon. Mercenary wars were waged against Angola and Mozambique as Reagan sought to save South Africa’s anti-communist apartheid regime.

The biggest CIA campaign was against Afghanistan. The Democrat Charlie Wilson was just a cheerleader.

What really happened in Afghanistan

When the regime of Mohammad Daoud was overthrown in 1978, five percent of Afghanistan’s population owned over 45 percent of the land. Women could be murdered if found not to be virgins when they were wed.

Over 96 percent of women were illiterate as were the vast majority of men. A third of the people in the countryside care were sharecroppers or landless laborers.

Revolutionaries belonging to the People’s Democratic Party fought this oppression. They looked across the border in the Soviet Union where people in Central Asia had lived under similar conditions before the 1917 socialist revolution.

For 70 years the Soviet government carried out the biggest affirmative-action campaign in history, bringing schools and hospitals to the area. Industries were built and electricity came to the countryside. Nations that were imprisoned by the czar were now free to develop their own culture and literature.

This aid wasn’t a one-way street. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers in the Red Army from the Central Asian Soviet Republics died fighting Hitler. Sabir O. Rakhimov—who was the first Uzbek to be made a general in the Soviet Army—died liberating Gdansk, Poland. Two million Uzbeks live in Afghanistan.

The first spark in Afghanistan’s revolution was the assassination of union leader Ahbar Haybar on April 17, 1978. Leaders of the People’s Democratic Party were imprisoned on April 26 for giving speeches at Haybar’s funeral. Within ten hours the Afghanistan army revolted and freed these political prisoners, using a tank to tear down the prison walls.

Decree number six of the revolution cancelled the debts of the poor in the countryside. A farmer in debt had to turn over half of their crop to the money lender.

Even a Pentagon study admitted, “The government trained many more teachers, built additional schools and kin-



Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter’s National Security Adviser inspects a gun during his trip to Khyber Pass, Pakistan, February 1980.

dergartens and instituted nurseries for orphans.” Textbooks were printed in the Dari, Pashtu, Uzbek, Turkic and Baluchi languages.

By 1985 there had been an 80 percent increase in the number of hospital beds. Brigades of women and youths went to the countryside to bring medical care to peasants for the first time.

None of this was to the liking of the feudal landlords whose rule the revolution challenged. The landlords organized counterrevolutionary gangs to terrorize people just as the Ku Klux Klan did here after the U.S. Civil War in the 19th century. One of the landlords’ leaders was Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who threw acid in the face of women not wearing a veil.

This Afghanistan Klan got support from President Jimmy “Human Rights” Carter. In a 1998 interview with the French weekly *Nouvel Observateur*, Carter’s National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski bragged that the CIA was already bankrolling the counterrevolutionaries by mid-1979.

It was in response to this CIA-backed campaign of violence that Soviet forces accepted the invitation of Afghanistan’s government to come to its aid on Dec. 24, 1979.

The CIA’s racist gangster

Much of the chemistry in the movie is between Charlie Wilson and Gust Avrakotos of the CIA. Avrakotos is a tough cookie who swears at a CIA official after being passed over for a job in Finland.

Actually he’s a super bigot. According to the book “Charlie Wilson’s War” by the late George Crile, Avrakotos loved to throw racial epithets in the face of his Black sec-

retary and everybody else.

None of this fazes Crile, who was a producer for the CBS show “60 Minutes.” The CIA is just a racist cesspool.

Avrakotos urged the Greek colonels who staged a coup in 1967 to murder Andreas Papandreou, who survived and served later as Greece’s prime minister.

The son of a sweatshop boss bottling soda pop, Avrakotos grew up in the steel town of Aliquippa, Pa., near Pittsburgh. In his youth, Avrakotos joined white gangs attacking Black people.

If Hollywood were going to make a movie about a genuine hero in Western Pennsylvania, it could consider Black Communist Benjamin Careathers, whose ceaseless efforts organized workers at the Jones and Laughlin steel mill in Aliquippa into a union in 1937, and who was jailed in 1953 under the mind-controlling Smith Act for his political beliefs.

Don’t waste your money

“Charlie Wilson’s War” whips up the audience as Soviet helicopters are shot down with U.S. stinger missiles. Soviet pilots are shown as fiendish characters who love to kill, unlike U.S. pilots whose bombs and rockets ravaged Korea, Vietnam and Yugoslavia and which still ravage Iraq and Afghanistan.

The movie not only claims that Charlie Wilson is responsible for driving the Soviets out of Afghanistan but also that the Soviet Union collapsed as a result. This is turning history upside down. It was the gathering counterrevolution that led to the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in early 1989.

Within three years of the Soviet withdrawal, the progressive Afghanistan government was overthrown. At least 50,000 people were killed in the capital of Kabul alone.

“Charlie Wilson’s War” is sexist anti-communist poison. Don’t waste your money on it. □

Bhutto murder sharpens Pakistan crisis

Continued from page 1

but which the Musharraf regime said on Jan. 1 would be postponed to February.

The deal that failed

Bhutto’s return in October from exile had been brokered by the Bush administration, which got General Musharraf to agree to drop the corruption charges. An article in the *Washington Post* of Dec. 28 described how Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, her powerful deputy John Negroponte and U.N. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad thought they had concocted a deal whereby Bhutto and Musharraf would share power in a coalition government that would continue to cooperate with Washington. Bhutto, it said, had agreed that U.S. planes could bomb targets in Pakistan’s Northwest territory, a stronghold of the Islamic movement opposed to Washington’s wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The idea was to keep Musharraf and the military in power, but with Bhutto giving the government a more democratic veneer.

“The administration concluded over the summer that a power-sharing deal with Ms. Bhutto might be the only way that General Musharraf could keep from being toppled,” wrote the *New York Times* bluntly on Oct. 20.

From the moment that Bhutto returned to Pakistan in October, however, it was clear that Musharraf had no intention of honoring the deal.

In her very first public appearance, at a huge rally in Karachi on Oct. 18, Bhutto narrowly missed being assassinated by powerful bomb blasts that killed 150 people, 50 of them her security guards. At that time, too, the government blamed Islamic militants, but her supporters told reporters that electric power to the whole area had gone out just before the blasts and blamed it on the regime.

Bhutto was then put under house arrest, where she continued to speak out against Musharraf, calling on him to step down. Her courage in the face of real threats on her life increased her mass support.

The PPP met just days after Bhutto’s assassination and elected her 19-year-old son, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, and her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, to take over the leadership, thus keeping this very wealthy dynasty at the helm of the largest party in Pakistan. The PPP is expected to win the most seats in the parliamentary elections—if the government allows them to be held.

Nawaz Sharif, head of the Pakistan Muslim League, who was prime minister until ousted by Musharraf’s coup in 1999, has called for the general to resign immediately from the presidency so “a government of national consensus” can be formed.

The Bush administration is now scrambling to try to put the pieces of its policy back together again. Its attempt to create

a coalition government between the military dictatorship and the bourgeois opposition has failed miserably. After years of Washington’s support for Musharraf, even demanding that he be more ruthless against its perceived enemies, anti-U.S. sentiment is stronger than ever in Pakistan, among both Islamic and secular forces.

Washington’s credibility with its “friends,” already in tatters, has tanked. Who among the many exiled political figures around the world will want to trust its guarantees of their safety now?

The situation seems ripe for the mass movements in Pakistan to demand no secret deals, no more intervention by imperialism, and the creation of a truly democratic and sovereign government committed to using the nation’s resources to address the urgent needs of the people for adequate food, shelter, education and health care.

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Israel threatens Gaza with all-out attack

By Sara Flounders

The Israeli siege of Gaza is an international crime of collective punishment on an entire population. It is a crime carried out with the full support and authorization of Washington.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had rejected overtures by Hamas, the militant Islamic group that is the elected government in Gaza, for discussions about even a temporary cease-fire. (New York Times, Dec. 24)

Now there are increasing calls within Israel, including from the head of the Israeli military, for a full-scale invasion of besieged and isolated Gaza.

Conditions today in Gaza are desperate; Israel severely restricts and in some cases even denies the entrance of even basic food, fuel and electricity. Water filters, water pumps and bottled water are barred. The most basic supplies, from soap to batteries for hearing aids, are prohibited. No spare parts of any kind are permitted. Even desperately needed incubators for babies or dialysis equipment cannot be repaired or replaced.

In the cold and crowded wards of Gaza City’s Shifa Hospital, the dispensary is out of 85 essential medicines and is close to using up almost 150 others.

There are rolling blackouts across the Strip. Previously Gaza barely functioned on 80,000 gallons of diesel fuel a day. But now Israel has reduced this to less than a third. Less than 24,000 gallons of diesel fuel a day are allowed in.

Without fuel and functioning pumps, even the pumping of raw sewage has become a major sanitation threat. Garbage heaps rot in the streets and in vacant lots due to the shortages of fuel to operate garbage trucks.

Practically all businesses are closed and their workers laid off for lack of raw materials. With all supplies severely restricted, inflation is spiraling to five and 10 times the prices of a year ago.

Travel into and out of Gaza is banned. Even severely sick patients cannot leave Gaza for treatment in hospitals in Israel, Egypt, Jordan or any other country. Health clinics, lacking supplies, are shutting down.

Previously 900 trucks a day entered Gaza. Now Israel has reduced the number to 15 trucks a day. A short list of about half a dozen basic articles is allowed in.

Gaza is a mere 25 miles long and only 6 miles wide. It is one of the poorest and most densely populated areas of the world. Most of the population are refugees who were expelled from their land by Zionist forces. They are destitute and have relied for decades on U.N. relief supplies and remittances from Palestinians working abroad for the most basic necessities. Now even these sources are being choked off.

But Gaza has always been a center of the most militant resistance to the Zionist state. Both the first Palestinian Intifada, or uprising, 20 years ago and the Intifada that started in 2000 began in Gaza.

Because of unrelenting Palestinian attacks on Zionist settlers in 2005, Israel was forced to withdraw from Gaza 8,000 of its colonizers, who had for 37 years seized the best land and available water.

But after withdrawing the settlers, Israel refused to allow a Palestinian state of any kind to function. Gaza, with a population of 1.5 million people, was turned into an even more rigidly controlled giant concentration camp.

Israel destroyed the airport and blocked the building of a harbor. All connections with the outside world were cut; even the sea lanes and fishing boats were blocked.

The long-promised “safe passage” road between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank was sealed. All crossings in and out of the Strip are under total Israeli control.

Previously, tens of thousands of workers from Gaza crossed into Israel as low-paid day laborers. Now even this bare-survival employment is terminated.

The more onerous that the repression and lockdown became, the more the Palestinian population responded with resistance. In 2006 in democratic elections, Hamas overwhelmingly won the popular vote.

The U.S. and Israeli response to the democratic election of Hamas was collective punishment of the entire population. Supplies were even more restricted, U.N. refugee aid curtailed, charities were shut down and even the Palestinians’ own tax revenues were withheld so that teachers, administrators and health staff could not be paid.

Despite desperate conditions of siege and almost total blockade, resistance continues.

Unequal and overwhelming force

Maintaining resistance in the face of the onerous siege has the overwhelming support of the population. The Palestinian resistance lacks jet aircraft, helicopters, radar, anti-aircraft batteries, tanks, electronic surveillance, satellite reconnaissance or any of the other sophisticated high-tech equipment that the Pentagon has endlessly supplied to Israel.

Yet not a day passes that Qassam rocket barrages are not fired at Israel. These rockets and grenades are machine-tooled by hand in garages or smuggled through tunnels. The southern Israeli town of Sderot is the closest target, but rockets are fired all along the borders of Gaza. For months more than 10 rockets or mortars have been fired from Gaza each day.

Despite the totally unequal struggle and the conditions of almost total deprivation, resistance fighters in Gaza have managed to accumulate primitive weapons and basic explosives. They are smuggled into the Strip through the many tunnels under its border with Egypt. The endless digging of miles of tunnels is itself an enormous accomplishment.

The unequal and overwhelming Israeli force versus the fierce Palestinian resistance can be seen in just one week of attacks.

According to the Palestinian Web news service Electronic Intifada, on Dec. 20, on the eve of the celebration of Eid al-Adha, a special Israeli unit sneaked into the Palestinian village of al-Msadar in the middle area of Gaza from the eastern border fence. Once there, Israeli soldiers stormed six tall buildings and held their inhabitants. They set up sniper nests. By early morning an Israeli Occupation Forces unit, reinforced by four armored bulldozers and 10 tanks, took positions in the area. Meanwhile, the IOF launched air strikes and artillery attacks, killing both civilians and fighters who responded to the attack.

Two days earlier an IOF spy drone had fired two missiles into one of the most densely populated areas in Gaza, killing four people whom Israel claimed were militants near the at-Touba mosque in Jabaliya refugee camp

On the same day, an IOF fighter jet fired a missile that hit a car on Said Aal-Aas Street in the al-Nasir neighborhood of Gaza City. Two people in the car were killed.

A day earlier, on Dec. 17, the IOF fired two ground-to-ground missiles at four

people in a field located in the al-Zaytoun neighborhood in the south of Gaza City. The four were killed.

In the West Bank, Israeli forces also continue to stage attacks, kidnappings and missile strikes. The entire West Bank, the other small fragment of Palestinian land occupied by Israel since 1967, has been carved into numerous tiny pieces, surrounded by 30 walls and hundreds of Israeli Defense Forces police checkpoints.

Full invasion of Gaza threatened

IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi declared in mid-December that the Israeli Army should enter the Gaza Strip in a large-scale military operation.

In past decades Israeli forces have invaded Gaza many times at a cost of thousands of Palestinian lives and massive destruction in efforts to smash the resistance. But what is now causing apprehension and great concern in Israel is that its forces will pay a price. In the past year Palestinian mines, and possibly anti-tank missiles, have been able to penetrate Israeli’s heavily armored 60-ton Merkava Mark-3 tanks. On Dec. 12 an Israeli tank was hit while on a raid inside Gaza.

The ability of Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon to destroy Israeli tanks and shoot down its helicopters, along with the ability of Iraqi fighters to destroy U.S. tanks, means that the IDF is no longer invulnerable. When Israel invaded Lebanon last August, it suffered a stunning defeat. Despite massive bombardment of the entire country and dropping more than 1 million deadly cluster bombs, its high-tech, massively armed military was unable to hold even a mile of land inside the Lebanese border.

Out of fear that Hamas forces in Gaza might have obtained anti-aircraft missiles, the Israeli Air Force now uses only helicopters equipped with anti-missile defenses when flying over the Strip.

The problem for U.S. and Zionist forces is that they have been unable to defeat the will and determination of the Palestinian people to fight for full self-determination and the right of all Palestinian people to return to their land.

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What does Workers World say?

FIFTY YEARS. Workers World begins its 50th year of publication with this issue.

That's 50 years of experience that we can use for going into the new year.

What will happen in the coming year cannot be predicted, but we know how it is starting.

The last year was the deadliest yet in the U.S. wars on the peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan. Maybe less deadly but not less criminal were the covert U.S. wars, particularly against the peoples of Venezuela and Cuba.

There's also a war at home against immigrants and the Black community.

It was a deadly year for Black America, as could be seen most graphically in New Orleans. Immigrant communities were battered with military-style raids on homes and workplaces ending in prison, deportation and dismemberment of families.

The economy appears to be heading into a recession. Recession is a mild word for the brutal reality. A recession means that workers are losing their jobs through shutdowns, losing homes in foreclosures and going hungry. Health declines because there's no affordable care available. Recessions are when labor unions are most needed to defend workers' rights, so the unions are under the most severe attack.

A recession is an unnatural disaster, something unknown in all history until the rise of capitalism. There's no natural law saying it has to happen. The only reason there's a recession is that, to capitalists, their profits are the only thing that matters at the end of the day. Human needs are sacrificed on the altar

of big business and Wall Street.

Over the years, during the constant ups and downs of the capitalist economic cycle, the circulation of Workers World newspaper has always risen during recessions. People know that Marx understood capitalism and that only the Marxists can explain what's going on.

During the coming year, which will be filled with the grandiose speeches and promises of Democratic and Republican politicians running for president, Workers World can be depended on to get to the root of the issues and cut through the politicians' smoke and mirrors.

Ultimately the problem is not either Republicans or Democrats. The problem is capitalism, and if you don't understand that you won't be able to find the solution. The solution can be found in the class struggle against exploitation, racist oppression and imperialist war.

Workers World will show the anti-capitalist solution every time. That's what we've done for 50 years.

Workers World is widely respected both in the U.S. and around the world for its consistent Marxist reporting and analysis. It is common in many political discussions for the question to come up, "What does Workers World say?" We know because we get asked that all the time.

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Please join our supporters and give your contribution to Workers World. □

JERSEY CITY

Social justice activists honored

The Jersey City Peace Movement sponsored a program on Dec. 30 that presented awards of appreciation to activists and organizations involved in community and political organizing of progressive struggles at home and abroad.

The standing room only event was held at the Pershing Field Vietnam Veteran's Community Center in Jersey City, N.J. The JCPM was formed after the U.S. bombed and invaded Iraq in March 2003. Since that time the JCPM has been connecting local community issues to an anti-war perspective, creating friends and allies along the way.

Organizations that were honored included New Jersey Solidarity—Activists for the Liberation of Palestine; Black Waxx Multimedia; Jersey City Youth Skaters; Peace and Justice Coalition initiated by People's Organization for Progress in Newark; Our Youth, a LGBT organization; Troops Out Now Coalition based in New York; Jersey City Food Not Bombs; New Jersey Acción (Action) 21, a mainly Latin@ group; 9/11 Truth Chapters in Jersey City and Red Bank; and Hoboken Farmboy, an organization that feeds the hungry.

Individuals cited for their contribu-

tions included Black Waxx artist and activist, Nana Soul; peace and justice activist, Dave Davis; and the late anti-war activist and Vietnam War veteran, Dave Cline.

Presenters of the awards were JCPM activists Adela Santiago, Erik-Anders Nilsson, Lisa Marie Palmieri and Trish Szymanski. The JCPM is a member of TONC.

Starting on Jan. 27, the JCPM will be organizing "Stop the War Sundays" on the fourth Sunday of every month, gathering at the Journal Square 9/11 Memorial Fountain in Jersey City from 12 p.m. until 1 p.m. For more information about JCPM, go to www.JCPM.org or email JCPeaceMovement@hotmail.com

JCPM demands are that the troops be brought home now; an end to racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, anti-Arab sentiment and homophobia; no war on Iran and other threatened countries; an end to war on Iraq and Afghanistan and other oppressed nations; an end to Congress funding endless war; and money for jobs, education, health care, food and housing—not for war!

—Monica Moorehead

Ethanol means higher food prices

By Kris Hamel

The energy bill signed by Pres. George W. Bush on Dec. 18, makes a big show of helping the environment, but only adds to the assault on both humanity and the earth, while throwing more assistance to the energy industry.

The bill mandates a huge increase in the production of ethanol, a plant-based substitute for fossil fuels, to 36 billion gallons by 2022. This is a nearly fivefold increase from current ethanol production levels. The bipartisan bill, passed by Congress with a 314 to 100 vote, also sets new higher standards for fuel economy on vehicles and sets a goal of eliminating incandescent light bulbs within ten years.

The bill was stripped of provisions requiring utility companies to develop and use renewal sources of electricity. Nor does it include government subsidies for the development of solar, wind, geothermal and other sources of alternative energy, subsidies which would have been paid for by higher taxes on oil companies, most of which are making record profits.

In signing the new law, Bush stated, "[Today] [w]e make a major step toward reducing our dependence on oil, confronting global climate change, expanding production of renewable fuels and giving future generations a nation that is stronger, cleaner and more secure."

But is this really the case?

Millions of people in the U.S. are deeply concerned about environmental problems caused by carbon emissions from fossil fuels, the depletion of the earth's ozone layer, and the horrendous destruction to the planet caused by global warming. Does the new energy bill really provide a solution to begin to turn around the deleterious effects caused by pollution and corporate-based destruction of the environment? Nothing could be further from the truth.

The energy bill has essentially mandated the creation of an entirely new oil-using industry, one that even its advocates admit they have no idea how to follow through on. The "plan" is to develop a huge new industry to convert agricultural waste and plant materials, primarily from corn, into fuel for automobiles.

Hundreds of new factories will be required, along with an infrastructure capable of hauling billions of tons of biomass or plant material, mostly corn, by gasoline-driven transport. Capitalists will need to invest billions of dollars for an uncertain return on a technology that is still in its infancy, a technology that many scientists say may have serious as-yet-unknown repercussions in terms of soil erosion, water runoff and soil fertility.

Trading water and corn for fuel

Estimates vary as to corn tonnage necessary for each gallon of ethanol produced. The Sierra Club notes that currently one ton of corn equals 39.4 bushels, which equals 110 gallons of ethanol. Millions more gallons of water will be required to produce the corn needed to make ethanol.

Already the ethanol boom has proven disastrous to many farmers and the people who eat the food they produce. Corn production is skyrocketing as U.S. farmers and agribusiness seek to cash in on the demand for more ethanol. Ninety-four million acres of corn were planted in 2007, the most since World War II, producing a record crop of 13.2 billion bushels. Wheat and soybean prices are near record highs while soybean production is down sixteen percent from 2006 in order to make room for growing corn. Feed costs are up 25 to 30 percent from last year as farmers look for other crops to feed livestock.

With prices at record highs, consumer food prices have increased over five percent in the last year alone as the cost of dairy products and meat spirals upward. The Consumer Price Index reveals dairy prices up 14 percent; meat, poultry and fish up 5.4 percent; cereal up 5.2 percent; and fruits and vegetables up 4.3 percent. Some analysts believe food prices may increase another three to four percent next year.

In the meantime, world food supplies are dwindling fast while food prices globally are reaching historic high levels, according to Jacques Diouf, head of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. A New York Times article on Dec. 18 stated, "The agency's food price index rose by more than 40 percent this year, compared with 9 percent the year before—a rate that was already unacceptable, Mr. Diouf said. New figures show that the total cost of food imported by the [poorest] countries rose 25 percent in the last year. ...

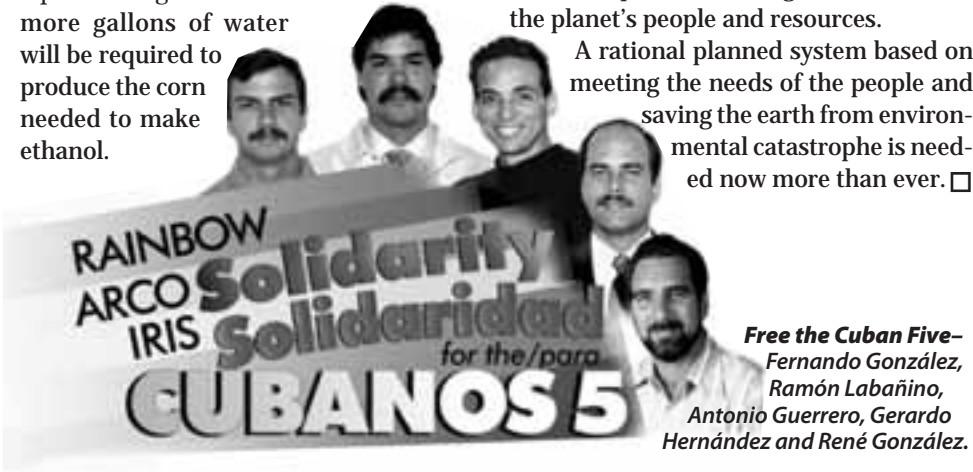
"At the same time, reserves of cereals are severely depleted, the agency's records show. World wheat stores declined 11 percent this year, to the lowest level since 1980." Diouf stated that prices of wheat and oilseeds are at record highs, with wheat prices having risen 52 percent since last year.

One in 12 people malnourished

FAO statistics paint a grim picture on world hunger and malnutrition. Some 854 million people around the world do not have enough food to eat. One in twelve people worldwide is malnourished, including 160 million children under the age of 5. Every 3.6 seconds someone dies of hunger (www.thinkquest.org). Many parts of the world face a severe shortage in potable water.

The new U.S. energy plan does nothing to alleviate the suffering of millions of people here and around the world who face poverty, hunger, malnutrition, low wages and skyrocketing food prices, high energy costs and a dwindling water supply. The profit-driven mandate for more ethanol is not based on concern for the environment, but on pumping billions of dollars into a newfangled industry that will itself use even more fossil fuels. Ethanol production will use agricultural land and water for fuel instead of food for human consumption, and place an even greater strain on the planet's people and resources.

A rational planned system based on meeting the needs of the people and saving the earth from environmental catastrophe is needed now more than ever. □



A saga of sabotage

Uribe again scuttles humanitarian exchange

By Berta Joubert-Ceci

President Álvaro Uribe Vélez of Colombia, in collusion with the U.S. administration, has once again sabotaged the hopes of many to be reunited with their loved ones.

In November Uribe had unilaterally and abruptly ended a process of negotiation with the Revolutionary Armed Forces-Popular Army (FARC-EP) of Colombia being facilitated by Colombian Sen. Piedad Córdoba and President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela. Its goal had been the liberation of 45 people retained by the insurgent group. It was hoped that this might then lead to a general humanitarian exchange, including some of the hundreds of guerrillas held by the government.

After Uribe's move, the FARC, in a humanitarian gesture and to "compensate the work" of both facilitators, in December offered to liberate three of the retained people anyway, without further negotiation. But due to increased bombings by the Colombian Armed Forces in the area of the jungle where the FARC and the retained people were believed to be, the liberation had to be postponed to ensure the safety of all involved.

This saga has a long chronology. In August, Sen. Córdoba had asked President Chávez to help her mediate the humanitarian exchange of people retained by the FARC for 500 guerrilla members in Colombian prisons. Chávez accepted and eventually Uribe nominated Córdoba as the official Colombian mediator, to be assisted by Chávez.

Uribe also approved a meeting between Córdoba and the FARC.

Relatives of the retained wrote to and eventually met with Chávez. They stated appreciation for the intervention of the Venezuelan president and said that "for the first time a serious attempt" was being made to liberate their loved ones. Chávez sent a message to FARC leader Manuel Marulanda asking him to help in the process.

In September, Córdoba met in the jungle with FARC spokesperson Raúl Reyes to advance the negotiations. The FARC welcomed this as a move to liberate the retained people and the guerrillas in prisons and also to begin a process that could lead to peace in Colombia.

Relatives of three U.S. military contractors held by the FARC, who would be part of the exchange, also met with President Chávez in Caracas and thanked him for the humanitarian action.

Latin American and European countries showed support for the exchange. French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Uribe then requested Proofs of Life (PoL) from the FARC to demonstrate that the retained were still alive. Sarkozy is interested in the case because one of the retained is Ingrid Betancourt, a former presidential candidate in Colombia who also has French citizenship.

Marulanda let Chávez know that he ordered the PoL. Chávez also met with FARC representatives in Caracas. He was hoping to take the PoL with him and Córdoba on Nov. 20, when they planned to visit Sarkozy in France.

Chávez expressed confidence that the PoL would be received but indicated that it might take some time, since the situation in the jungle is very dangerous. It is a war zone where the Colombian Army and U.S. military contractors and "advisers" regularly operate and bomb.

On Nov. 21, Uribe abruptly ended

the mediation role of Sen. Córdoba and President Chávez. This happened after U.S. Ambassador to Colombia William Brownfield stated, "We are two months and 22 days into this process and we still have no proof of life."

Uribe argued that the negotiations were a risk to Colombia's so-called democratic security. "Democratic Security" is basically a repressive policy tailored after the U.S. Patriot Act. Uribe harshly criticized Chávez, accusing him of having "expansionist" plans for Latin America. Venezuela recalled its ambassador to Colombia and relations between both countries went into a freeze.

Several days later, the Colombian Supreme Court opened an investigation of Sen. Córdoba for attempting "to break the law and treason to the Homeland." She later made public that she knew of plans of Colombian government allies to assassinate her.

Families of the retained expressed anger towards Uribe and asked Chávez and Córdoba to continue the efforts to liberate their relatives.

At the end of November, the Colombian Army arrested three people in Bogotá who were carrying five videos and several letters from the prisoners to their relatives. Córdoba angrily stated that these were the PoL she and Chávez had been waiting for, and that the three people had been unjustly imprisoned. The government announced it had "decommissioned" the PoL. Córdoba accused the Colombian government of interfering and promised to get lawyers to defend the three, stating she would not leave them unaided.

In a September letter to Chávez, Marulanda of the FARC had said that Uribe did not really want peace. Chávez read from the letter in December, quoting Marulanda as saying that "while the government of Colombia refuses to clear an area for the purpose of meeting and attaining an agreement that allows the release of the prisoners, to analyze the basis for later encounters ... to attain peace, he facilitates sufficient comfort to the 2,500 or 3,000 North American military advisers."

On Dec. 8, a message from the FARC announced it would liberate three people,

but only to Chávez or a person he would designate, as a gesture of "desagravio"—compensation for the good work of Córdoba and Chávez. The people were Clara Rojas, assistant to Ingrid Betancourt; her 3-year-old son Emmanuel, who was conceived out of a love relationship with a guerrilla member during captivity, and former congresswoman Consuelo Perdomo.

From then on the mechanism for the liberation began to be worked out. Communication with the FARC established the complex mechanism that would guarantee the safety of all involved, including the prisoners and the guerrilla members who were to deliver them to safety.

Chávez wanted the collaboration of the Colombian government. He called the operation "Transparency" and requested the presence of other countries. Seven countries sent representatives: Brazil, Ecuador, Cuba, Argentina, Bolivia, France and Switzerland.

U.S. filmmaker Oliver Stone was part of the international delegation, which was led by former Argentine President Nestor Kirchner. They all met in Caracas and then flew in specially marked helicopters to Villavicencio, a town in Colombia close to Bogotá. As soon as the FARC gave the OK, they would go from there to pick up the retained.

Uribe promised to help, yet every step of the way he obstructed the process, setting a deadline of Dec. 31 for the operation. Chávez, on the contrary, would not set a deadline, stating that the operation might last more days because he had heard there was heavy bombing where the FARC and the retained were located.

On Dec. 31, Chávez received a message from the FARC stating that the operation had to be postponed. The bombing had intensified after the Colombian government intercepted the PoL, making it impossible to guarantee everyone's safety. As soon as conditions would permit it, the operation would resume, said the FARC, so that "they will be home with their relatives."

That morning, Uribe unexpectedly went to Villavicencio. News accounts said Bush had called him that morning to ask

about the exchange and the Free Trade Agreement. In early afternoon, after meeting with all the international delegates and trying to dissuade them from going through with the operation, saying they "would not be safe" with the guerrillas, Uribe held a lengthy press conference, again and again accusing the FARC of being terrorists and liars.

He presented, as a hypothesis, that the FARC were not going to liberate the prisoners because they did not have Emmanuel; that the boy was in fact in the hands of the Abused Children Department in Bogotá. Uribe had his "peace commissioner," Luis Carlos Restrepo, who represented the Colombian government in the operation, read in detail to the press the record of abuse of a little boy Uribe alleged was Emmanuel. Uribe added that he would request a DNA sample from Clara Rojas's relatives in order to "prove" his hypothesis.

At of Jan. 2, five DNA "experts," all from Colombia and requested by Uribe, were in Caracas to get a DNA sample from Rojas's relatives. What credibility will these tests results have? Probably the same as Bush's "weapons of mass destruction."

The international delegates accused Uribe of interfering with the operation. Chávez said that "Uribe dynamited the third phase of this operation." Oliver Stone accused Uribe of sabotaging the exchange, telling the AP: "Shame on Colombia, shame on Uribe." All the delegates immediately left for home, saying they were willing to return as soon as requested to continue with the operation.

An article in Argentina's El Clarín, written by Paula Lugones, the paper's special envoy to Villavicencio, wrote that the Colombian government "wanted to break the cohesion of the [Argentine] delegation. They even housed them in different places." She also denounced what she said were "spy operations, where a phantom plane constantly flew over Kirchner's room and there were microphones everywhere."

In spite of these developments, Chávez has promised to continue the operation, even if it has to be performed clandestinely. □

Catalan, Serbian workers 'squat' in factories

By Martha Grevatt

The phrase "sit-down strike" generally evokes images of the 1930s, specifically the 1936-37 takeover of General Motors in Flint, Mich., that led to the recognition of the United Auto Workers. However, in 2007 a number of sporadic sit-downs have occurred outside the U.S., most recently in Serbia and the Catalan region of Spain. Workers at the Behr auto parts plant in Barcelona and the "Shinvoz" factory in Zrenjanin, Serbia, are ringing in the new year by occupying their place of employment.

Earlier this year workers occupied factories in Canada, Australia, Wales and in the Spanish state.

The 470 Shinvoz metal workers are protesting the privatization of their factory. They are supported by workers of Jugoremedija, a pharmaceutical plant that workers had occupied to protest being privatized. They ended the nine-month occupation when their 58 percent stake in the plant was restored.

"At this moment," writes the Balkan

edition of Z magazine, "these workers are the most progressive element of Serbian society. They are fighting for their own working places, for equal rights, and they are inspiring whole Serbia to fight against neoliberalism."

The article went on to explain that when a firm is privatized, "the buyer of the state-owned factory does the following: through illegal means he first puts the company in enormous debt to his own firms. Then he takes it out of bankruptcy. This rids his company of all smaller shareholders and all obligations towards the workers from the original collective bargaining agreement with the privatized company."

Meanwhile, the 300 Frape Behr workers are protesting a "labor force adjustment plan" to eliminate their jobs, as well as the retaliatory firing of six workers. Their slogan in Catalan is: "Guerra, guerra, guerra, La Frape no cerra" (War, war, war, La Frape will not close). Supporters are demonstrating outside the occupied plant.

Behr, based in Stuttgart, Germany, makes automobile air conditioning units. The workers have received messages of

solidarity from unionists in Germany, Norway and Canada. They have asked for protest letters, faxes, and phone calls to be sent to Behr company locations in the United States:

Behr Heat Transfer Systems, Inc.
4500 Leeds Avenue, Suite 201
Charleston, SC 29405-8521 Phone
843-745-1233 Fax 843-745-1285
Behr Dayton Thermal Products
1600 Webster Street Dayton, OH 45404
Phone 937-224-2900 Fax 937-224-2915
Behr America, Inc. 2700 Daley Drive
Troy, MI 48084 Phone 248-743-3700
Fax 248-743-3701
Behr Climate Systems, Inc. 5020
Augusta Drive Fort Worth, TX 76106
Phone 817-624-7273 Fax 817-624-3328
The workers ask us to "please send copies of your protest letters, as well as copies of distributed materials and pictures from solidarity actions, to the IWA Secretariat, so that a comprehensive list of activities can be made and forwarded to the comrades in struggle: secretariado@iwa-ait.org." □

FreshDirect usa intimidación contra inmigrantes para detener campaña sindical

Por Milt Neidenberg
Nueva York

Novecient@s trabajador@s que se encuentran en medio de una campaña de sindicalización en los almacenes de FreshDirect están bajo ataque del ICE (Servicio de Inmigración y Control de Aduanas de Estados Unidos) que opera en complicidad con la compañía de entregas de comestibles, basada en Queens de Nueva York. La compañía ha suspendido a varias decenas de trabajador@s, predominantemente inmigrantes latinas, y ha despedido a otr@s.

Una elección sindical está programada para los días 22 y 23 de diciembre. Tanto la unión de los Teamsters como la UFCW (Unión de Trabajadores de Alimento) están en la papeleta, junto a la opción de “ninguna unión”. La compañía y el ICE han emprendido una investigación ilegal y despiadada contra l@s inmigrantes para sabotear la campaña de la unión.

L@s trabajador@s laboran de 12 a 18 horas diarias, incluyendo horas extras obligatorias, trabajando de pie en temperaturas cercanas a la congelación para asegurar la frescura del alimento que embalan, tasan y etiquetan. Preparan las cajas, muchas de ellas muy pesadas con las mercancías enlatadas, para que los camioneros y los ayudantes de entrega las lleven a su destino. Por este trabajo agotador donde todo el año es invierno, cobran alrededor de \$7,50 sin beneficios marginales. Según se informó, un supervisor le dijo a l@s trabajador@s, “¿qué de malo hay en trabajar tantas horas? Ahora usted no tiene que buscar un segundo trabajo.”

El Local 805 de los Teamsters es el más

visible, luchando con líneas de piquete y manifestaciones, buscando apoyo del público y exponiendo las condiciones brutales que l@s trabajador@s del almacén tienen que aguantar.

El Local 805 ha acusado a la compañía de usar prácticas injustas de trabajo. FreshDirect debe ser investigada y acusada de violaciones al Acta de los Estándares Justos de Trabajo y a los estatutos de salud y de seguridad del OSHA (Acta de Seguridad y Salud en el Trabajo). Bajo estas condiciones brutales, l@s trabajador@s del almacén necesitan desesperadamente su propia organización y parecía que la victoria de la unión era una cosa segura.

Pero entonces llegó ICE, el espantoso huésped invitado por FreshDirect para arruinar la campaña de organización con un reinado de terror y miedo.

El 9 de diciembre a las 4:30 de la mañana, mientras l@s trabajador@s se reportaban a su trabajo en la fría oscuridad, los supervisores les sorprendieron con un memorándum indicando que eran blanco del ICE. Con miedo a ser detenid@s y apresad@s en sus puestos de trabajo, y lo más terrible de todo, que fueran separad@s de sus hij@s, much@s trabajador@s eligieron volver a sus casas.

En las estaciones de trabajo, los supervisores les exigieron a l@s trabajador@s que mostraran los papeles que probaran que su estado de inmigración era legal. “Algun@s simplemente se fueron.” dijo Sandy Pope, presidente del Local 805. “Lloraban mientras llevaban bolsas de basura llenas de ropa de sus armarios. Pensaban que no tenían forma de arreglar sus documentos, así que se fueron.”

Funcionarios de la compañía advirtieron

a l@s emplead@s que no vinieran a buscar sus cheques, como una severa amenaza de que el ICE iba a buscarles. Funcionarios de la unión buscaron conseguir amig@s y partidari@s que pudieran tomar los cheques para l@s trabajador@s.

Operación ilegal de vida o muerte

Aquí estaba la operación “Choque y Espanto” de Bush en el lugar de trabajo, calculada para romper la voluntad de l@s trabajador@s de apoyar una propuesta de organización sindical. Pero la campaña de terror es sintomática de una conspiración más siniestra para deshacerse de l@s que han venido aquí desde sus patrias empobrecidas.

La campaña nacional del ICE, en concierto con el Servicio de Rentas Internas (IRS) y la Administración del Seguro Social (SSA) para forzar a l@s 12 millones de inmigrantes para que prueben su estado “legal” está amenazando el movimiento sindical. FreshDirect alega que recibió cartas de “no-concordancia” (en inglés, no-match letters) del SSA donde le informaba que los números de Seguro Social proporcionados por vari@s trabajador@s no eran legítimos.

El presidente de los Teamsters James Hoffa, ha cuestionado el derecho del ICE a investigar los expedientes de l@s emplead@s de FreshDirect. Hoffa cita la propia política interna del ICE que dice: El ICE se inhibirá de actuar inmediatamente acerca de cualquier información recibida referente al empleo de extranjeros indocumentados o desautorizados... donde parece que la información se pudo haber proporcionado para interferir con o tomar represalias contra los empleados por su derecho” a formar una unión. ICE, una

agencia neofascista en el Departamento de Seguridad de la Patria, está funcionando por encima de la ley.

Según el “UE News Update”, el 10 de octubre, el Juez Charles R. Breyer de California, “determinó que la política de Bush es ilegal, y ordenó al Departamento de Seguridad de la Patria a pararlo inmediatamente. Su decisión también prohíbe a la administración del Seguro Social enviar 141.000 cartas de “no-concordancia” a los patronos, cubriendo a más de ocho millones de emplead@s. ... El juez dijo que el gobierno falló en seguir los procedimientos apropiados para emitir la nueva regla, lo que tendría ramificaciones masivas’. ... La política habría responsabilizado a los patronos basado en las cartas de “no-concordancia” del SSA”. (13 de octubre)

Las burocracias del gobierno tienen órdenes de proveer datos llenos de errores sobre la identificación para atrapar a l@s trabajador@s inmigrantes. El informe de UE indica que “12,7 millones de las 17,8 millones de discrepancias... pertenecen a ciudadan@s nacid@s en los EEUU”.

FreshDirect cooperó con ICE y el SSA ilegalmente para atrapar a l@s trabajador@s e interrumpir las elecciones de la unión. Estuvieron en contra de l@s mism@s trabajador@s que están pagando al fondo fiduciario del Seguro Social.

Deben contestar cómo recibieron estas cartas que violan la orden de restricción del juez federal. ¿Violaron ICE y la Seguridad de la Patria la decisión del juez Breyer? L@s trabajador@s suspendid@s y despedid@s deben ser regresados a sus trabajos con restitución completa hasta que finalice una investigación inmediata e independiente por los Teamsters, el UFCW y otros partidos interesados. □

BOLIVIA:

La mayoría indígena enfrenta a separatistas ricos

Por Dee Knight

La mayoría indígena de Bolivia se movilizó masivamente durante los días 15 y 16 de diciembre para defender los logros conseguidos a través de la Asamblea Constituyente que concluyó el 12 de diciembre. Los líderes de la vieja oligarquía europea y racista declararon la “autonomía” el 15 de diciembre en las provincias orientales de Santa Cruz, Tarija, Beni y Pando. Estas provincias abarcan más de la mitad del territorio nacional, pero tienen solamente alrededor de una tercera parte de la población de Bolivia. También poseen la mayor parte de la abundancia del gas natural y del petróleo de Bolivia y es la región agrícola más rica.

El presidente Evo Morales puso las fuerzas armadas en atención. L@s partidari@s del gobierno fuera de Santa Cruz, el centro del movimiento de “autonomía”, tomaron armas y crearon bloqueos, según un reporte de CNN. Millares de personas se movilizaron el 15 de diciembre en el La Paz, la capital, en defensa de la nueva constitución. “No permitiremos que Bolivia sea dividida,” declaró el presidente Morales

a la muchedumbre. “Deben devolver el dinero que tomaron de nosotros,” dijo. “Investigaremos retroactivamente todas las grandes fortunas, y los corruptos ahora están temblando de miedo.

“Bolivia es una nación entre naciones,” dijo Morales, refiriéndose a la diversidad de los pueblos indígenas cuyas tradiciones datan de siglos. “No somos un país solo de gente con ojos azules, con ojos verdes. Es un país plurinacional compuesto de pieles oscuras y pieles blancas. Esta nueva constitución nos unirá.” (CNN, 12 de diciembre)

Morales es un miembro de la nación Aymara, que junto al pueblo Quechua y a otras 35 nacionalidades indígenas, compone la mayoría abrumadora en este país de 9,5 millones. Estos dignos pueblos, descendientes de la vieja civilización inca, fueron esclavizados por los conquistadores españoles, y han permanecido esencialmente oprimidos y explotados, hasta las luchas actuales, que trajeron a Morales a la presidencia en diciembre de 2005.

La administración del presidente Morales nacionalizó la industria del gas y del petróleo en el 2006, a pesar de las protestas de la élite y sus promotores

en las grandes compañías petroleras transnacionales. Ahora, en los nuevos estatutos de la constitución, la mayoría de las comunidades indígenas tendrán autoridad local, sus 37 idiomas se convertirán en idiomas oficiales del país, y lo más que horroriza a la oligarquía es que tendrán el derecho a recuperar la tierra robada a sus antepasados a través de generaciones. La nueva constitución también impone nuevos impuestos a los ricos, para devolver la riqueza nacional al pueblo.

Los líderes de la oligarquía boicotearon la asamblea constituyente donde fueron aprobados estos estatutos. Aún así protestaron con horror los resultados. “Evo [Morales] nos está poniendo en el camino del caos con ideas que discriminan contra la gente que no es indígena”, declaró el presidente del separatista Comité Pro Santa Cruz en una entrevista el 16 de diciembre con El New York Times. Los “líderes de la autonomía” de la élite redactaron actas regionales que darían poder sobre las regalías del gas natural, las políticas agrícolas, y la fuerza policiaca, a los funcionarios provinciales. También proponen limitar la migración del pueb-

lo indígena a las provincias del este del Altiplano, donde vive la mayoría.

Hay cierta ironía en que los antiguos dueños de esclav@s se muevan para declarar autonomía después de que l@s descendientes de l@s esclavos y l@s trabajador@s forzad@s se hayan levantado para reclamar lo que les fue robado. Y parece que creen que tienen una petición justa sobre “autodeterminación” contra el nuevo gobierno que por primera vez en 500 años representa verdaderamente a la mayoría del pueblo. Tan ridículo como parezca, los elitistas están absolutamente serios, y parecen tener confianza, posiblemente debido a la ayuda de las gigantes compañías petroleras y de los imperialistas en Washington.

Pero Morales y la mayoría indígena también están serias, y están listas a luchar para asegurar que su país permanezca unido y se devuelvan las riquezas robadas a su pueblo. La consiga en una vigilia de millares de mineros indígenas, campesin@s, organizaciones comunitarias y otras fuera de la asamblea fue “¡Ahora sí empieza el cambio!” (Indy, La Paz, 12 de diciembre) □